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Contacts: Joe Ferson, 617-626-1119

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION ROLLS OUT NEW WINTER STORM MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) today unveiled its Winter Storm Management Plan, outlining a new system of priorities for snow removal throughout the state's urban parks and parkways, including sidewalks, crosswalks and pathways. The public can now access (at www.mass.gov/dcr/winterstormplan.htm) a map that illustrates DCR's snow-removal procedures, which emphasize public safety around schools, hospitals, police and fire stations as well as flood zones and traffic bridges.

The plan includes provisions for storm emergencies, internal and external communication during storm events, and a DCR Storm Center, which functions as an operations center to facilitate internal communications.

DCR also announced an expanded snow-removal partnership with the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD). Last year, MHD conducted curb-to-curb snow removal on 20% (102 lane miles) of DCR parkways. This year, MHD will plow 40% (204 lane miles) of DCR parkways, though DCR will remain responsible for sidewalk, crosswalk and pathway snow removal. It is anticipated that MHD will have responsibility for plowing 100% (509 lane miles) of DCR parkways next year.

"This represents a significant transition for DCR and a sharpened focus on activities that are critical to its mission as a parks and recreation agency," said DCR Commissioner Stephen H. Burrington. "As we have less responsibility for plowing roads, we will be able to dedicate more staff time and equipment to dealing with the snow on our sidewalks and walking/biking paths."

The Department purchased almost \$1 million in new snow removal equipment in the last fiscal year, including specialized plows to remove snow from sidewalks, walkways and bike paths.

Another important element of the Department's snow removal improvement effort is involving key partners in reviewing and revising plans as well as achieving results on the ground. "Recently, we held meetings with the public works departments in the municipalities where our parkways and reservations are located," said Commissioner Burrington. "We're also consulting with walking and biking advocacy groups to refine our methods and gather input on

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COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600
Boston MA 02114-2119
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax
www.mass.gov/dcr



Mitt Romney
Governor

Kerry Healey
Lt. Governor

Stephen R. Pritchard, Secretary
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Stephen H. Burrington, Commissioner
Department of Conservation & Recreation

our performance. Our goal is to ensure public safety and to clear more walking and biking paths to give people the opportunity to enjoy healthy exercise during the winter season.”

“Massachusetts bicyclists rely on bike paths for transportation year-round,” said MassBike Executive Director Dorie Clark. “MassBike strongly supports any measure that will help ensure DCR paths remain safe and accessible to bicyclists and pedestrians during the winter months.”

To further improve its snow removal efforts, DCR is researching practices of Madison, Wisconsin; Boulder, Colorado; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and other communities with cold, snowy climates that have bicycle path networks and many commuter cyclists. “We want to learn from their successes and failures, and use this information to make improvements here in Massachusetts,” said Commissioner Burrington.

This year, DCR is making use of Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to support snow removal. DCR’s GIS Office, in partnership with MassGIS, has mapped every roadway, sidewalk, pathway and crosswalk for which DCR has responsibility. This includes 509 lane miles of parkways and 185 miles of sidewalks. The maps use color coding to distinguish the priority for snow removal for each facility. The maps code sections of road and path by priority level, and show detail down to the precise locations of fire hydrants and crosswalks, helping staff carry out their duties more efficiently.

DCR has prioritized all snow removal locations according to the following categories:

- Level 1 (snow removal during storm events): primary roadways and parkways, State Police barracks, traffic bridges, potential flood zones and designated passages within immediate proximity to schools while in session.
- Level 2 (snow removal within the first 24 hours after storm event): secondary roadways and parkways, State House passage and street parking, foot bridges, and crosswalks and safe passages to schools, bus shelters, bus stops, and T stations, including median strips and handicap ramps.

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- Level 3 (snow removal may occur beyond the first 24 hours after storm event): ice rinks if open, interior park roads and tertiary parkways, DCR facilities and building parking lots, and less traveled sidewalks and crosswalks (including some pedestrian paths regarded as multi-use trails) to be cleared as utilization and specific public safety needs warrant.

DCR anticipates continued cooperation from abutters in clearing the remainder of Level 3 priority sidewalks consistent with practice under municipal ordinances within the metropolitan Boston area.

DCR's website includes a link (www.mass.gov/dcr/winterstormplan.htm) to information on the Winter Storm Management Plan and maps detailing snow removal priority locations. This interactive map displays parkways, sidewalks, pathways, and crosswalks color coded by their plowing priority. Also depicted are fire hydrants, hospitals, police stations, fire stations, schools, bus stops and other features relevant to snow removal planning.

Feedback on snow removal efforts on parkways, including those cleared by MHD, and other DCR-owned facilities should be reported as follows: emergencies during business hours and all non-emergencies – call the DCR Community Relations Group Line at 617-626-4973; emergencies after business hours – call the State House Base (staffed 24 hours, 7 days a week) at 617-722-1188.

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